

TRIBUTE TO PAT LAVELLE

April 3rd, 1986

Ladies and Gentlemen --- It's an honour for me to be asked to present a tribute to Pat Lavelle on behalf of the membership of APMA and to share that privilege with Vic Van Der Hout, our Honorary Chairman who will add his own comments after my remarks and then make a presentation.

We've had a busy day, an interesting and worthwhile day. We've had speakers from management of the United Auto Workers, of Domestic auto makers and car builders who are New Canadians. And, they've given us a lot of food for thought.

It's astonishing enough that they all sat down at the same table. They did so without reaching for the knives or breaking any crockery. And this year, like every other year, we've demonstrated our appetite for growth and change. Change and more change - there's a big job ahead.

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In 1974, the year Pat Lavelle joined APMA we had a cumulative deficit under the auto pact estimated at 12 billion dollars and growing. In 1986, we have a cumulative surplus of four billion dollars and growing. That should give every member of APMA a lot of satisfaction. What we've learned though, is: we can't get fat and sassy. New governments, talk of free trade, and the ever changing economy brings with it the need for adjustment and restructuring.

The job won't be made any easier for loss of our chief. Pat Lavelle has been chief forecaster, chief of staff and chief negotiator since 1974.

Perhaps I should put things in perspective by talking about the auto parts industry in Canada and its history. That means, talking about Lavelle who has been an integral part of the industry for over a decade. I asked Pat for a few anecdotes and for the first time since I've known him, he had nothing to say. That's part of the price you pay: the people who make history never have time to think about it until it has been made.

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The history of this industry has been characterized by a storm of ill-founded criticism that we couldn't compete, by new competition that caught us flat-footed, and challenges that has buried some companies. Many in our industry now hesitate to call themselves parts makers since they've moved from manufacturing components to fabricating and sub-assembly. As to whether we're a Canadian industry.... with parts going into vehicles made in a half-dozen countries well, I don't know.

In the centre of all of this confusion, in the eye of the hurricane so to speak, Pat has weathered the storm. Under a private microscope, he has examined our flaws and through an inner telescope, appraised our long-term potential.

More significant perhaps, the president of our association has explained the problems and illuminated the potential in a language understood on the assembly-lines as well as in the halls of government. Lavelle has practised on hundreds of platforms, what Longfellow preached: "In all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity". From thousands of conversations and observations, Pat has woven a case for innovation and investment that everybody who counted could understand. Buyers and suppliers, management and manpower, people in high places and with high hopes, have been persuaded that they could profit from listening to common sense.

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I don't want to portray Pat as the wise, old man of the auto industry. Besides, I'm not at all sure Linda would appreciate a 46-year old husband with a long, gray beard.

The art of being wise was defined by psychologist William James as the art of knowing what to overlook. And, Lavelle always has been willing to overlook disagreements with other people -- as soon as they admitted, he'd been right all along.

Not that he succeeds all the time. He went to France in 1979 as senior representative of the Ontario government. He was determined to become fluent in French....(pause)... Fortunately, Mrs. Lavelle is a New Brunswick native and fully bilingual.

"Escargot", Pat, is French for "snails" and Canadian parliamentarians. "Escalier" is French for "stairway", a handy word for somebody who wants to get up in the world, but not much use at dinner time.

Perhaps as deputy minister of Industry, Trade and Technology, Pat may be sent back to Paris. It wouldn't surprise me. He has never been content to do anything well, just once.

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He was executive assistant twice at the federal level: to the Ministry of Labour and to the Government House Leader in the Senate.

He became president of this association in 1974 and returned in 1981.

He was twice a publicist and twice a journalist.

Sometimes people make mistakes the first time they try something. Pat's the only man I know who's stubborn enough to return to the scene of his crimes and try to repeat them to see if the results are the same.

He's the first to tell you that experience is a great teacher. I've always agreed with Vernon Law, the baseball player, who said that experience is a hard teacher since she gives the test first and the lesson to be learned follows.

Certainly, the president of this association has had to learn on the job. A lesser man might have compromised our membership and its objectives. To Pat, compromise was encouraging our opponents to speak up, feeding them so many contrary points of view that eventually, the only thing they would swallow was his own logic.

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In the early seventies, he made the auto pact an issue. He lobbied for a full review and as our spokesman, turned the discussion from whether changes were necessary to where changes were needed.

Pat got behind the effort, slid behind the wheel and sometimes, got out of the conference rooms to give the movement a shove.

Lavelle's subtle, behind-the-scenes efforts sometimes worked best: a nudge to get people off the mark and a tap to get things back on track. When sales slowed in the recession, he persuaded tight-fisted provincial Treasurers to remove the "Plus Sales Tax" stickers off new car windshields. And again, you'll remember, he did that not once, but twice.

At the Federal level, he inspired two assistance plans -- the Industry and Labour Adjustment Program and the Industrial and Regional Development Program.

At the Provincial level, he fostered another two incentives -- the Employment Development Program and the current Auto Parts Investment Fund.

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Not that his attitude was ever provincial. He was special advisor on international trade and commercial affairs at the 38th General Assembly of the United Nations. He's one of the few people to understand that GATT is the General Agreement of Trade and Tarriffs, a means of promoting and producing Canadian products for foreign sale. Given his own way, Lavelle probably would have spelled it: G-A-T-T-T, with three T's instead of two, and called it: "The General Agreement To Talk Turkey".

His candour, as much as his commitment and sense of humour, have won respect and recognition.

There are civil servants, and politicians alike, who considered a meeting with the team led by Pat Lavelle to be a beneficial and worthwhile experience.

Certainly, his relations with the directors of APMA have made this an association where they never felt like visitors but were welcome to get actively involved. And, that's not so in every association, as many of you know.

We have developed close working relations with most foreign vehicle companies doing business in Canada. Here, our sight has never been clouded and our demands have never been unrealistic.

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There can be no question, that the industry has been reaching out and growing up. Shipments in 1974 were worth two and a-half billion dollars; in 1986 their value is thirteen billion. Investment this year will exceed 300 million dollars. It was less than 100 million in 1974.

Most remarkable, in 1974 we showed a deficit under the Auto Pact, whereas we now have a surplus of five billion dollars.

In general terms, the most rewarding aspect of how the auto parts industry has evolved is employment. Back in 1974, employment stood at 55 thousand employees with a payroll of 600 million dollars.

Our payroll this year will exceed two and a-half billion dollars, divided among 65 thousand employees.

To no small degree, this improvement traces back to federal task forces. Pat co-chaired one in 1983 on the auto industry's future with Bob White of the Canadian U.A.W. The outcome set the policy framework for most federal measures to date. The task force also began the process by which Toyota, Honda and Hyundai decided to invest in assembly plants in Canada.

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Here again, never content to do anything well, once, Lavelle co-chaired another federal task force in 1985 on manpower problems and prospects in the auto industry. It indicated clearly, not only to governments, but to all of us, that if the industry is to survive and succeed, our people will have to re-train. Re-train not for jobs in other fields, but in the auto parts business.

Both task forces were unique. Pat was the general of our troops, the builder of roads to understanding, the author of new laws, new rules, under which the key players and governments would operate when all the bickering was done.

Soldier, builder, law-maker....it makes Lavelle sound like Napoleon. The comparison may be valid. When the little Corsican took over the French army in Italy, he described them as "ill-fed and almost naked". Certainly, some members of this assembly are more robust and better able to protect themselves than they were a dozen years ago. Mind you, Bonaparte promised the troops that he would lead them to "the most fruitful plains in the world". Pat's never been that rash.

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None of us believe, we've heard the last of Pat. As deputy minister of Industry, Trade and Technology, he shares with us some of the challenges and concerns we face as an industry. The prospect of an economic down cycle is on the horizon. Manpower re-training is needed in the colleges and universities. The role of the Auto Tech Centre will increase. Import penetration will continue. We'll need help re-structuring the industry. And, free trade talk is in the wind from all four points of the compass.

It is hard to imagine Pat Lavelle saying what Napoleon did at Waterloo: "Sauve qui peut (NB: pronounced soave qui puh) -- and you may be able, Pat to improve on that pronunciation. It's hard to imagine Pat Lavelle saying, "Save yourself if you can". Our hope is that Pat Lavelle will always be a friend at court.

Pat Lavelle deserves much tribute for the state of health of the auto parts industry in Canada. To amplify this further I now call upon our much beloved and esteemed honorary chairman, Vic Van Der Hout, to come to the podium and to conclude this tribute.